

TURN AGILE LEST BECOME FRAGILE





Seeing through the timeline


I was wondering over our cultural beliefs, the very idea of "Agile" in India was over the ages. We didn't have a strict command of norms within us. We have not followed the waterfall model in teams of our culture, like in the west. While I am not claiming anything is wrong in the Waterfall, to be flexible, we need to adopt "Agile", and we did. Until we had rulers from the west rule over us.

Everything from religion to business to medicine or any other branch of wisdom was based on Agile concepts and contributions were also voluntary. Hence the richness of the culture since no one had forced anyone to contribute. It was something like open source. I hope you get the analogy.


One day, it struck me that "if we adopt the Agile methods to the corporate culture, we will come up with contributions full of richness and speed" which could drastically reduce the turnaround time.

Challenging the western school and getting back to the old

Let's recall the factory line concept of Ford Motors producing the Model T in millions towards the beginning of the last century. This concept had great success in terms of its productivity and profit, and made both its customers and owners happy. But none paid attention to the happiness of the people who slogged day and night to make things happen. Millions melted over several decades burning all the energy but getting nothing but salary in return. There might have been millions who had brilliant ideas and got little attention. Imagine the progress and innovations our world would manifest if these people had the freedom to express themselves in terms of creativity and freshness in approach. Till today we are following the same old methods developed by our previous generation.



When we ponder over the anomalies of the current system, which showcases the hierarchical nature of cascading power, we need to pray to God every time you work for a boss, he/she may better be good, accommodative and supportive. But we see a lot of HR companies thriving just because of this fact that 90% of the people leave organizations because of managers and join some other organizations only to find themselves suddenly appreciative of the earlier manager. We see that the brain has tricked to compare and to appreciate the earlier manager who is suddenly harmless.



What if we can have an organization where everyone behaves in a modular way? What if there is a framework of centralized guidelines for all the departments and teams to follow? Each unit is independent and tied to one another in terms of interfaces. Yes, you got it, I am talking about forming the management of an organization with a little bit of OOPS and managing it in terms of Agile methodology. Is this the holy grail of organization management? No. Many people have talked about it. Many people down the ages have followed it. If you consider the carvings of different temples of our past, various teams didn't wait for one person to be guide always. There must be a robust framework, that each team exactly knows what, how, along with the timeline for accomplishment.

Traditional methodology

In a dynamic environment, you may have observed stakeholders, customers, partners, regulators have very stringent needs and investors breathing down our neck demanding growth. This may be achieved through acquisitions, restructuring, competition and collaborators instigate rapidly changing priorities.

Frequent introduction of disruptions.

Businesses and Industries are sensitized and commoditized through digitization. The introduction of newer methodology and with the recent fad of automating, we have started talking about machine learning, Internet of Things, Robotics, Analytics and more.


Speed of executing due to WWW, the Internet comes to the rescue to make the concepts of Blockchain, [Cloud](#), and soon to bring in advantages to handle increased volumes of data, handle data more transparently and indulge in multichannel communication and complex collaboration with customers, partners and internal teams.

Organization as a living knowledge organism

People want to explore and contribute to the ever-growing knowledge of the organizations and to be recognized. Not many in the current age want to work in a mechanized manner. Hence, we are looking at organizations as a learning center.

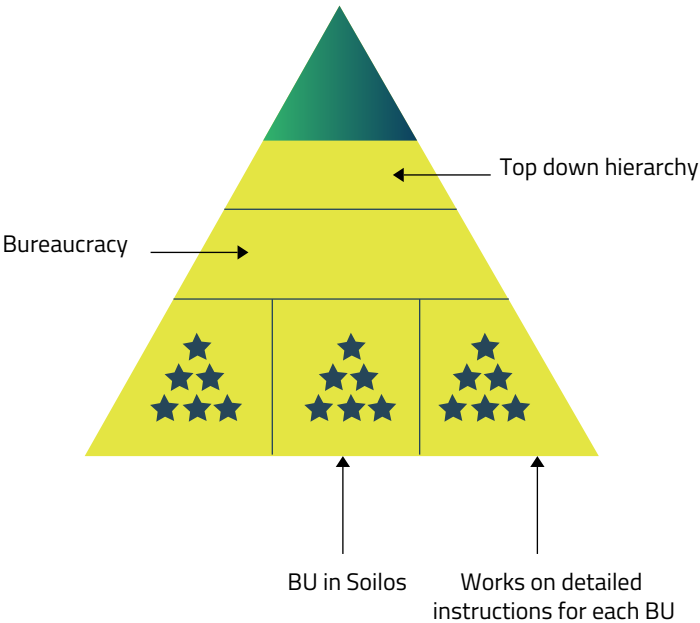
As per McKinsey, "Agile organizations are more stable and dynamic".

They give the analogy of the mobile phone which accommodates n number of applications which reside side by side in cohesiveness to improve our productivity.

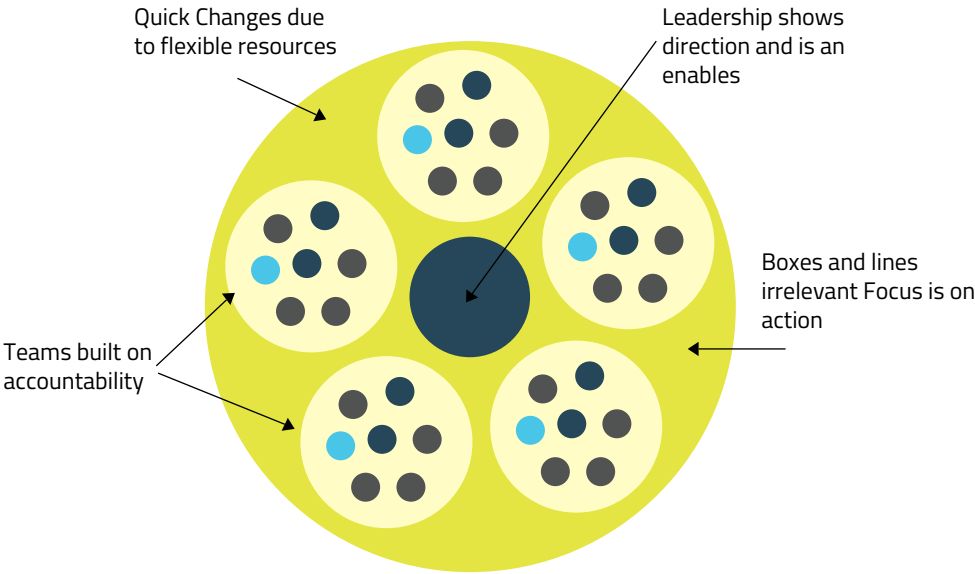




Agile Organizations respond like a living organism that mobilizes quickly and effectively act on a problem.



Organizations like Machines



Organizations like living Organisms

One may say there are about five characteristics of an Agile organization: Strategy, Structure, Process, People and Technology

Here is a depiction of the traits we may inculcate when we adopt and imbibe agile in our ethos completely

	Characteristic	Organizational Traits
 Strategy	Beacon guidance across organization	Common vision Aware of Opportunities Flexibility in resource sharing The guidance that can be worked on and not waited upon
 Structure	The Collaboration of empowered team islands	Flat Structure Everyone is accountable Cascaded governance Communities that practice Live partnerships Open environment. Seamless between physical and virtual Appropriately positioned for the purpose
 Process	Rapid decisions and learning	Quick Iterations Quick Learning Defined ways of working Performance visibility Transparent in information flow Continuous learning org Action-based decisions
 People	People teams which are competitive and dynamic	Cohesive teams Shared and accommodative leadership Entrepreneurial ethos Dynamism in roles
 Technology	Technology for future	Evolving technology architecture, systems and tools Next-generation tech incubation

Beacon guidance across organization

Earlier, we had success by peering into our competitors, and now, we are more confident as we recognize the abundance of opportunities. Our current growth is based on collaborating and creating value for all the stakeholders.

The shared purpose and vision are like a beacon for an Agile organization.

According to McKinsey - "Agile organizations reimagine both whom they create value for and the way they do that".

They are strongly customer-focused and explore to meet diverse needs across the customer life cycle and are committed to create value with a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

The Collaboration of empowered team islands

As peoples are directed to work with purpose and responsibility. They are highly engaged and collaborative and with exceptional team efforts, derive solutions based on situations.

1

Agile organizations have top-level structure but replace much of the remaining traditional hierarchy with a flexible, scalable collaboration of teams. Collaboration is a natural way to organize efforts because they balance individual freedom with holistic synchronization. To build Agile organization, leaders must understand humans to build an Agile organization, leaders must realize human collaboration in terms of building, collaborating, nurturing and teaching them to business and humans. In order to achieve, we need to focus on several points. Implementing a clear flat structure that reflects and support the values established by the organization.

2

Need to be responsible and assign roles accordingly such that it has smooth conduct of work across the organization saving time and energy & not necessarily depend on manager approval.



3

Propagate hands-on **governance** where cross-team performance management and decision rights are pushed to specific roles.

It is at this interaction level where decisions are made as close to relevant teams as applicable in small groups, and these teams are highly productive and well-coordinated.

Practices to become communities of knowledge and practice as professional islands for people, with respective roles for attracting and building talent, sharing knowledge and experience, and providing stability and re-use over time as people rotate between different practices and functions.

4

Create active partnerships with external service providers, vendors, partners that can build a genuine relationship with a vast network, so the organization can obtain the best talent and ideas, generate insights, and co-develop new products, services, and solutions. Maintain open physical and virtual environments which empowers people to do their jobs most efficiently in the environment that is most appropriate. This open environment ensures transparency, communication, collaboration, and unforeseen idea exchange between teams and units in the organization.

Rapid decisions and learning

In a traditional hierarchical environment, for being successful in an endeavor, the most senior and experienced will define which way we are headed with detailed plans and with a thought process to curtail on the risk.

In the current Agile environment, we are overwhelmed in a constantly evolving environment, and that itself drives us towards the future. The best way to tackle risk and succeed is to embrace uncertainty and be nimble in trying out new things.

The organization will shift into repeat mode with rapid cycles of thinking and work is closely aligned to creative thinking and accomplishment. Examples could be design thoughts, lean operations, "Agile" development and implementation or any other continual rapid iteration of thinking. Moving away from the waterfall and stage gated management approaches, enterprise-level, we will be planning the rapid-cycle model to stimulate strategic thinking and execution. Unlike the traditional annual planning, budgeting, and review, we will have to move to quarterly cycles, dynamic management systems like key performance indexes and rolling six months or short duration budgets.



Some of the traits of an Agile organization to be inculcated are,

Focus is on rapid iteration and experimentation. Teams produce a single primary deliverable very quickly, often in one- or two-week "sprints." During these short activity bursts, the group holds frequent, daily, check-ins to share progress, solve problems, and ensure alignment. Between sprints, team members meet to review and plan, to discuss progress to date, and to set the goal for the next race.

Agile organizations believe in regular communication and processes where the same format is adhered to by all the teams.

Agile organizations are performance oriented based on shared goals across the end-to-end work of a specific process or service, and measure business impact rather than activity driven by dialogues and constant learning through feedback with the target on focus.

Agile organizations are transparent where everyone knows where and when to find what information he/she is looking, and ensures the psychological safety of the employees. Everyone is heard.

Agile organizations have continuous learning-enabled not only based on business needs but to fulfil individual aspirations. This ensures diversity in knowledge management and enhancement. Thus, improving the business.

Agile organizations emphasize quick, effective, and continuous decision making. It's better to opt smaller decisions as a part of rapid cycles rather than going for a bigger one. Smaller decisions can be quickly tested and we can adjust them as and when needed. A senior member of the team may be seen learning to disagree.

Technology for future

Technical capabilities were deriving our service, platforms, tools based on priorities, resource availability and budget.

New technologies are connecting to every corner of the organization, which is helping to unlock the real value of a quick turnaround to business and stakeholder needs. Hence to adopt agile into an organization, we need to focus on right technology and tools, with relevant processes to support speed and agility as required and applicable. The products and services should be adapting to the change as per customer needs. All products and services should be automated or digitally-enabled based on evolving technology architecture.

Teams are encouraged to use hackathons, crowdsourcing, and virtual collaboration spaces to understand customer needs and develop possible solutions quickly. New technologies like [DevOps](#) need to be adopted to work with different disciplines and work closely together.

An agile test to find where we stand

Start-Up

- ▶ Start-Up
- ▶ Creative
- ▶ Frenetic
- ▶ Ad hoc
- ▶ Reinventing the wheel
- ▶ No Boundaries
- ▶ Constantly shifting focus
- ▶ Un predictable

Agile

- ▶ Quick to mobilize
- ▶ Nimble
- ▶ Collaborative
- ▶ Easy to get things done
- ▶ Responsiveness
- ▶ Free flow of information
- ▶ Quick decision making
- ▶ Empowered to act
- ▶ Resilient
- ▶ Learning from failures

Trapped

- ▶ Un coordinated
- ▶ Stuck
- ▶ Empire Building
- ▶ Fighting Fires
- ▶ Local tribes
- ▶ Finger Pointing
- ▶ Under Attack
- ▶ Rigid
- ▶ Protection "turf"

Bureaucracy

- ▶ Risk averse
- ▶ Efficient
- ▶ Slow
- ▶ Bureaucratic
- ▶ Standard ways of working
- ▶ Siloed
- ▶ Decision escalation
- ▶ Reliable
- ▶ Centralized
- ▶ Established

Well, once the evaluation is through, we will need to focus on how we can steer the organization into the Agile quadrant with Agile organizational processes with Agile methodology. Roles and responsibilities will have to be defined in line with Agile methodology. Techniques and methods are not discussed in this paper and is considered out of scope as that is a different extensive topic altogether.

Final thought -

“ Organizations need to think and understand that if they **don't turn Agile, they are fragile.** ”

I think
we are on the
right path.
Aren't we?



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